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ABSTRACT

A study explored the effects of both the sales representative's and the target consumer's biological gender upon the persuasive strategy choice of the salesperson. Data from 204 salespeople responding to a 27-item questionnaire were collected over a 6-week period. The results indicate clear differences between men and women sales representatives with respect to compliance-gaining strategy use, with men engaging in a larger number of strategies when attempting to sell a product. However, the sex of the target customer appears to have no effect upon compliance-gaining strategy use. (EL)

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Women, Men and Personal Sales: An Analysis of Sex Differences in Compliance Gaining Strategy Use

by

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Job performance in personal sales, perhaps more so than in any other profession, depends upon the communication style, skills and ability of the individual sales representative. Yet, despite the centrality of human communication to successful task function, a striking dearth of research focused upon sales communication has been conducted up to this point. The purpose of the present study is to begin filling the void by exploring the effects of both the sales representative's and the target comsumer's, biological gender upon the persuasive strategy choice of the salesperson. First, the paper discusses the importance of exploring the effects of biological gender in personal sales. Secondly, relevant persuasive strategy research is outlined. Finally, the study method, results and discussion are presented.

In part, the role of biological gender is important in personal sales because of the increasing number of women entering the sales field. While women have long held the majority of the lower paying retail sales positions (e.g. department store clerks and food service personnel), they have traditionally been absent both in higher level and paying sales positions. In the last decade, however, the employment mix in this profession has been rapidly changing. Carter and Bryant illustrate the dramatic change when they report that:

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Demand for women in industrial sales and related areas is increasing. As an example, Computer Sciences Corporation of El Segundo, California, had but four female marketing and customer service representatives in 1973. Five years later, however, one of its sales divisions went to 50 women on a 200 person staff. Xerox hired over 1200 people for sales jobs in 1977 and 419, or 31%, were women, and IBM has doubled its female salesforce since 1974. In addition, the percentage of women selling insurance increased from 2% of all life insurance salespeople in 1972 to 12% in 1978.

U. S. Labor Department statistics indicate that 70.4% of the entire retail salesforce was women and that only 7.6% of the 850,000 wholesale and manufacturer sales representative jobs were held by women in 1977. However, according to a Business Week survey released in early 1979, the picture is changing rapidly. Women now hold corporate sales jobs in steel, aluminum, lumber, and other traditionally male-only industries. The Aluminum Company of America has a 190 person salesforce and 10% are women. A recent study of chemical and printing companies showed that 14 companies employed 36 industrial saleswomen in 1972. In the same industry, 43 companies employed 402 female industrial sales representatives. The increase is over 1100%.

Due to the increasing number of women in sales, their performance versus men becomes a natural concern for sales management professionals. For example, if males and females perform differently, then training and development programs need to be assessed with respect to these differences. Furthermore, since women are relative newcomers to the upper echelons of the sales field, special consideration must be given to adjust both males and females to any differences which may exist. Such efforts should allow practitioners to tap the best sales abilities and behaviors of both sexes.

A second reason for examining the biological gender differences in salespeople is to provide a substantive, scientific basis for assessing performance independent of any traditional stereotypes which may exist. Many people believe that one sex is inherently superior to the other in sales ability and such attitudes constitute a serious potential for unnecessary and unethical discrimination against both sexes. The following is one example of such an attitude, cited in Carter and Bryant which places women as superior to males in sales positions:

> D. D. Miller, Board Chairman of Rumrill-Hoyt, Inc., of Rochester, NY believes that women are often better sales representatives than men. He advocates business publications hiring more women as sales representatives and, speaking at a meeting of the American Business Press, he said, "Women are often far better prepared, far more organized, and do a far better follow-up job, and think a lot faster on their feet than do their male counterparts.[2]

In contrast, Swan and Futrell report that many sales managers believe that women may not perform in the sales role quite as well as men.[3] In either case, little research examining the communication of males and females in sales has been conducted which might lend support to the respective claims of both positions.

A more fundamental question of concern to scholars is not so much whether or not one sex possesses sales skills superior to the other, but do they do it differently, and if so, how are they different? A simple test or tests of differences between the sexes is important to people exploring the nature of human relations in the professional as well as the social realm. Because sales is fundamentally a persuasive undertaking, a natural starting point in sales communication research is to explore the effects of biological gender upon sales strategy use. To begin this endeavor, since such research in sales has not been conducted in the past, the recent strain of research in communication examining compliance gaining strategy choice will be reviewed because it is of direct relevance to the present discussion.

Compliance gaining strategies have been defined as "a form of symbolic behavior designed to shape or regulate the behavior of others." Stated differently, compliance gaining strategies are message plans which people develop to induce a set of behaviors in others which they might not have otherwise evoked. Sales agents, for example, attempt to induce a potential

customer to become an actual customer via the use of one or more compliance gaining strategies. Research in this area has been of two fundamental types known as taxonomic, which is designed to identify the potential number of strategies one might engage in any given persuasive situation, and message efficacy, which includes investigations with respect to variables affecting the invocation of the various strategies by persuaders.

Taxonomic research, while the subject of much investigative and theoretical work[5] as of yet has not resulted in an agreed upon exhaustive list of potential compliance gaining strategies. Although the researchers have employed different underlying logics in their compilations of strategies, none has been able to derive a complete taxonomy as evidenced by the disparate content of each effort.[6] The purpose of this investigation is not one of taxonomic development but nonetheless such research impacts upon any study of strategy use because any research is bound by the response alternatives of the people considering the potential list of strategies. Consequently, rather than employing a single taxonomy, this study utilizes 27 strategies derived from Marwell and Schmitt[7] and Falbo[8]. This list is probably not exhaustive but it captures a broader range of persuasive behaviors than any single taxonomy. Since all of the strategies are measured by single indicant items such an integration is a simple procedure.

Aside from the above taxonomic research, several people have conducted message efficacy research with a variety of variables. Cody, Woelfel and Jordan provide a review of a broad range of studies, not germane to the present effort, investigating the nature of several situation and personality variables involved in the choice of compliance gaining strategies by persuaders.[9] Their review suggests that such variables deserve further investigative efforts.

Research exploring gender effects upon compliance gaining strategy use has been reported by Burgoon, Dillard, Koper and Doran.[10] They utilize the Marwell and Schmitt taxonomy and measure biological gender effects of the persuader with both a summative (a measure of liklihood use with the taxonomy as a whole) and a nonsummative approach (a measure of use likelihood utilizing each strategy as a separate dependent variable). They discover no significant effect with the summative approach, however, differences in use likelihood with two strategies were found with the nonsummative tests. Males were more likely to use aversive stimulation while females rated higher in likely use on the liking strategy. They conclude that the nonsummative results warrant further investigation into biological gender differences "in other samples that are more diverse in terms of age and education."[11]

This study comprises one such investigation called for by Burgoon et al., however, several important differences besides the nature of the population must be noted. First, rather than creating narrative situation stories where the respondents are asked which strategies they might use, as most of the research in this area has done, the current effort asks salespeople to indicate which strategies they actually used in a real sales situation. Secondly, the salespeople responded to the sixteen Marwell and Schmitt items as well as eleven additional strategies from the Falbo taxonomy (see Table 1). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the sex of the target consumer is considered as well as the sex of the agent. If biological gender is a factor in compliance gaining strategy use, then the biological gender of every person involved should be considered.

In summary, while previous research has examined the effects of biological gender in compliance gaining strategy use, no such effort has been made in

personal sales. The purpose of this study is to begin filling the void in this area. Towards this end, the following research questions are posited:

RQ1: Does biological gender affect the degree to which salespeople use a compliance gaining strategy?

RQ2: Does sex of target affect the degree to which salespeople use a compliance gaining strategy?

RQ3: Does the interaction of biological gender and sex of target affect the degree to which salespeople use a compliance gaining strategy?

RQ4: Are there clusters of compliance gaining strategies which differentiate salespeople based upon biological gender?

RQ5: Are there clusters of compliance gaining strategies which differentiate salespeople based on the sex of the target?

RQ6: Are there clusters of compliance gaining strategies which differentiate salespeople based on the interaction of biological gender and sex of target?

Sample and Procedure

Subjects for this study were 204 salespeople, representing 90 businesses, including 70 from the automobile industry (28 dealers), 59 from the insurance industry (39 agencies), and 75 from the real estate industry (23 agencies). Data was collected over a six-week period in cities which range in size from under 2,000 to over 500,000 people.

The sample includes 56 females (10 from insurance; 46 from real estate) and 148 males (70 from the automobile industry, 49 from insurance and 29 from real estate). A wide range of ages are represented, with 15% of the sample under 30, 29% from 30-39, 31% from 40-49, 21% from 50-59 and 6% from age 60

and over. In addition, all levels of education are represented, from people with only a partial high school education to those with graduate degrees. Sales training and experience levels are also broad based with 20% of the sample having had no formal sales training and a range of experience levels from just hired to those with over ten years in the sales profession.

To secure a response from subjects the researcher entered each business and contacted someone from the sales staff and requested permission to have all the salespeople on duty respond to the study questionnaire. Each subject was given the questionnaire which required them to respond to several demographic items and then instructed them to recall their most recent initial customer contact which has lasted at least fifteen minutes. Following this, the subjects reponded on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from definitely did use to definitely did not use for each compliance gaining strategy.

Operational Definitions

Biological gender--

There were two levels, male and female.

Sex of Target--

There were three levels of sex of target: female, male and a male/female pair. This was done because the above commodities are often purchased by couples rather than single individuals.

Compliance Gaining Strategies--

This variable was measured via a 27-item instrument with each item containing a strategy, definition and a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from definitely did use to definitely did not use. The scale is an adaptation of Marwell and Schmitt's (1967) scale with eleven additional items derived from the Falbo (1977) scale. This represents a comprehensive list of strategies de-

rived from the literature concerned with the taxonomic development of compliance gaining strategies.

Statistical Analysis

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) model was used to answer research questions 1, 2, and 3. Twenty-seven separate 3 x 3 ANOVAs were performed, each using a different compliance gaining strategy as the dependent variable. To account for any correlation between the strategies (dependent variables), alpha was set at .0025 for each ANOVA, resulting in a total alpha of .054.

To answer research questions 4, 5, and 6, a 3 x 3 multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed. A Multiple Discriminant Analysis (MULDIS) was used as a post hoc test to locate differences among the groups identified in the MANOVA. Alpha for the MANOVA/MULDIS was set at .05.

Results

Research question one asked if biological gender affects the degree to which salespeople use compliance gaining strategies. The results of the ANOVA's revealed a significant main effect for biological gender on eleven of the twenty seven strategies. Group differences, representing greater use by males, are found with promise ($F = 16.93$, $df = 1$; $p < .001$), positive expertise ($F = 13.03$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$), pre-giving ($F = 17.00$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$), positive altercasting ($F = 23.88$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), compromise ($F = 13.05$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$), emotion target ($F = 14.58$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), hinting ($F = 11.02$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), persistence ($F = 18.62$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), thought manipulation ($F = 13.18$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), evasion ($F = 12.31$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), and fait accompli ($F = 21.79$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$).

Research question two asked if sex of target affects the use of compliance gaining strategies. The results of the ANOVAs revealed no significant main effects for the sex of target indepenbent variable.

Research question three asked if an interaction between biological gender and sex of target affects the use of compliance gaining strategies. The results of the ANOVAs revealed no significant interaction between these two variables.

Research question four asked if clusters of compliance gaining strategies exist which differentiate salespeople based upon biological gender. Results from the MANOVA revealed a significant one-way main effect for biological gender (Wilks F = 2.57, df = 27/172, $p < .00013$).

Research question five asked if clusters of compliance gaining strategies exist which differentiate salespeople based upon the sex of target. Results from the MANOVA revealed no significant main effect for sex of target (Wilks F = 1.10, df = 54/344, $p < .297$).

Research question six asked if clusters of compliance gaining strategies exist based upon the interaction of biological gender and sex of target which differentiate salespeople. Results of the MANOVA revealed no significant difference from the interaction of these two variables (Wilks F = 1.12, df = 54/344, $p < .27$).

The MULDIS revealed one significant discriminant function ($\chi^2 = 63.82$, df = 27, $p < .0001$). The items loading highest on this function were positive altercasting (.54) and fait accompli (.51). This function was not labeled; the reason will be discussed below. Centroids were computed for each group on the significant function. The female centroil was -1.0, the male centroil was .39.

Discussion

Both the nonsummative and the summative results indicate clear differences between men and women sales representatives with respect to compliance gaining strategy use. Surprisingly, however, the sex of the target consumer appears to

have no affect upon compliance gaining strategy use. In toto, the findings in this study suggest males engage a larger number of strategies than females when attempting to sell a product. While the results offer no absolute explanation as to why the differences between men and women sales representatives exist, they provide grounds for speculation and suggestions for future research.

Unfortunately, thematic continuity appears to be lacking when the group of strategies which differentiate men and women in this study are examined. In the nonsummative (ANOVA) data, the strategies are neither all prosocial (evasion, thought manipulation) antisocial (positive expertise, positive altercasting), verbally aggressive (hinting, emotion target) or similar in style (compromise, persistence). Furthermore, although the summative data (MANOVA/MULDIS) produces a significant difference, the discriminate function does not provide a consistent theme (positive altercasting, fait accompli). The top eleven strategies loading on the discriminate function are the same as those uncovered in the nonsummative data with loadings ranging from .47 to .54. Thus, while the differences between male and female sales representatives are pronounced, the rationale for these differences is unclear.

Irrespective of why the differences exist, the results indicate that women and men approach the task of selling quite differently. Given that in each case men responded with higher use, they appear to utilize a broader spectrum of compliance gaining strategies when confronting a customer than does a woman sales agent. The respective approach of each seems to occur no matter what the sex of the target consumer happens to be in the selling situation. One proposition suggested by these findings is that males use the "shotgun" approach to customer adaptation, which is consistent with male sex role socialization. In other words, men tend to be task rather than relationship focused, thus they

will do whatever it takes to get the job done, but are not quite certain as to how this should be accomplished when the task is relational in nature. Women, on the other hand, probably utilize no one strategy more so than another, but are more accurate in deciding which strategy is the best approach in any given sales situation. To decide which is better is a case of pure speculation, since both sexes seem to be able to accomplish the task of selling. However, the differences may be a good illustration of the concept of equifinality, two alternative approaches achieving the same end.

A note should be made concerning these results vis a vis the Burgoon et al. study. They failed to detect either the number of strategy differences in the nonsummative approach or any differences with the summative approach. The inconsistent findings of the two studies may be explained by a myriad of reasons. First, obviously the samples are different, suggesting greater sampling of non-college student populations is necessary in the future. Secondly, the present study utilized a larger strategy list thereby allowing more differences to be detected. Third, salespeople were asked to respond to the strategies based upon actual use rather than likelihood of use. Jackson and Backus suggest that the stories used to generate likely use responses may confound the results of compliance gaining strategy studies. Finally, sales professionals may simply view strategy use differently than other people. All of these differences point to the need for further study and replication in compliance gaining strategy research.

Biological gender appears to be an important variable in the assessment of sales communication practices. Aside from a need for replication, future research should continue to explore the nature and extent of the differences between women and men in sales occupation. Some key areas include, success measures, communication satisfaction, nonverbal differences, argument construc-

tion and use, differences in the sexes with respect to the type of sales position and the effects of psychological gender orientation. This list is by no means exhaustive, however, it points to the paucity of research in an important organizational and vocational area.

The results of the present study indicate great differences between women and men sales representatives, but provide little explanation as to why these differences exist. Men use eleven of the strategies to a greater degree than women when the data is analyzed with each strategy as a separate dependent variable and appear to use more strategies overall when they are scored in a summative manner. More needs to be understood concerning these differences as more women enter the profession. In addition, sales training needs to be conducted with a strong consideration for these differences if it is to help all salespeople improve their performance. At this point the gender gap in sales communication can be considered neither good nor bad, but it certainly should not be ignored.

Notes

[1] Robert N. Carter and Milton R. Bryant, "Women as Industrial Sales Representatives," Industrial Marketing Management, 9 (1980), 23-26.

[2] Carter and Bryant

[3] John E. Swan and Charles M. Futrell, "Men Versus Women in Industrial Cales: A Performance Gap," Industrial Marketing Management, 7 (1978), 369-373.

[4] William J. Schenk-Hamlin, Richard L. Wiseman and G. N. Georgacarakos, "A Model of Properties of Compliance Gaining Strategies," Communication Quarterly, 30 (1982), 859.

[5] See Toni Falbo, "A Multidimensional Scaling of Power Strategies," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 35 (1977), 537-47., J. Marwell and D. R. Schmitt, "Dimensions of Compliance-Gaining Behavior: An Empirical Analysis," Sociometry, 30 (1967) 350-64, R. L. Wiseman and W. J. Schenck-Hamlin, "A Multidimensional Scaling Validation of an Inductively-Derived Set of Compliance-Gaining Strategies." Communication Monographs, 48 (1981), 251-70.

[6] See Falbo, Marwell and Schmitt, and Wiseman and Schenck-Hamlin.

[7] Marwell and Schmitt.

[8] Falbo.

[9] Michael J. Cody, M. L. Woelfel and W. J. Jordan, "Dimensions of Compliance-Gaining Situations," Human Communication Research, 9 (1983), 99-113.

[10] Michael Burgoon, James P. Dillard, Randall Koper and Noel Doran, "The Impact of Communication Context and Persuader Gender on Persuasive Message Selection," Women's Studies in Communication, 7 (Spring, 1984), 1-12.

[11] Burgoon, Dillard, Koper and Doran.

[12] Sally Jackson and D. Backus, "Are Compliance-Gaining Strategies Dependent on Situation Variables," Central States Speech Journal, 33 (1982) 469-79.

Table 1

Compliance Gaining Strategies

1. Promise - (Definition): You offered to reward the customer for buying your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use								Definitely Did Use
	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	

2. Threat - (Definition): You threatened the customer with negative consequences if he/she did not buy the product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use								Definitely Did Use
	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	

3. Positive Expertise - (Definition: You told the customer that your expertise about the product/service allows you to assure him/her that he/she would benefit by purchasing the product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use								Definitely Did Use
	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	

4. Negative Expertise - (Definition: You told the customer that your expertise about the product/service allows you to assure him/her that he/she would suffer negative consequences by not purchasing the product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use								Definitely Did Use
	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	

5. Liking - (Definition: You acted friendly and helpful to get the customer in a "good frame of mind" so that he/she would buy your product/service.)

Definite Did Not Use								Definitely Did Use
	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	

6. Pre-Giving - (Definition: You somehow rewarded the customer before you tried to sell him/her your product/service).

Definitely Did Not Use								Definitely Did Use
	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	

7. Aversive Stimulation - (Definition: You somehow punished the customer and made it clear that the punishment would cease if and only if he/she bought your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use								Definitely Did Use
	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	

8. Debt - (Definition: You told the customer that he/she should buy your product/service because of past favors you have done for him/her.)

Definitely Did Not Use								Definitely Did Use
	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	

9. Moral Appeal - (Definition: You suggested to the customer that it would be immoral not to purchase your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use								Definitely Did Use
	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	

10. Positive Self-Feeling -(Definition: You told the customer that he/she would feel better about him/herself if he/she bought your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use								Definitely Did Use
	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	

11. Negative Self-Feeling - (Definition: You told the customer that he/she would feel worse about him/herself if he/she did not buy the product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

12. Positive Altercasting - (Definition: You pointed out that a person with good qualities would buy your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

13. Negative Altercasting - (Definition: You pointed out that only a person with bad qualities would refuse to buy your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

14. Altruism - (Definition: You stressed how badly you needed for the customer to purchase your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

15. Positive Esteem - (Definition: You pointed out that people would think better of the customer if he/she bought your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

16. Negative Esteem - (Definition: You pointed out that people would thing badly of the customer if he/she refused to buy your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

17. Compromise - (Definition: You told the customer that you would be willing to give a little if he/she would give a little in order to sell your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

18. Deceit - (Definition: You used flattery or lies in your attempts to sell your product/service to the customer.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

19. Emotion-agent - (Definition: You used your facial expressions in your attempts to sell your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

20. Emotion-target - (Definition: You tried to influence the emotions of the customer to help you sell your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

21. Hinting - (Definition: You used indirect attempts to get the customer to buy your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

22. Persistence - (Definition: You continued to repeat your attempts to sell your product/service throughout your conversation with the customer.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

23. Reason - (Definition: You used rational argument to sell your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

24. Simple Statement - (Definition: You used matter-of-fact statements without supporting evidence or threats to sell your product/service.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

25. Thought Manipulation - (Definition: You tried to make the customer think that your ideas were his/her ideas.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

26. Evasion - (Definition: You tried to hide the strategies you used from the customer.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use

27. Fait accompli - (Definition: You were determined to sell your product/service, regardless of what the customer said.)

Definitely Did Not Use ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Definitely Did Use